

Holiday Food Safety

Did you know there are more than 250 different types of Foodborne Illnesses (FBIs)? As the holiday season approaches quickly, the experts at the FDA's Center for Food Safety say "People get sloppy." With the rushing around for the holiday season, there is an increase of FBIs substantially. Each year, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates 48 million people get sick from FBIs. It is your job to ensure this number does not increase!

You may be wondering, what is the **first step of preventing illness** caused by food handling? It's simple: **hand washing**! How often do we forget or don't take the time to wash our hands properly? You would be surprised! Hand washing between tasks is one of the easiest ways to minimize bacterial contamination and keep you and your food safe. Anyone handling food should wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds after using the restroom, handling raw foods, if sick or simply as often as necessary. Using hand sanitizer does not eliminate all bacteria's as would hand washing. If you absolutely want to use sanitizer, it is best to do so after washing your hands. So be sure to take more precaution this year while preparing food for loved ones and friends.

Holiday cooking is often prepared ahead of time and transported to a different location to enjoy. All meat and poultry products are especially important when preparing, they must be cooked to appropriate temperatures to kill unwanted illness causing organisms. **Pork should be cooked to the internal temperatures of 155°F, chicken 165°F, and beef 145°F.** One of the most challenging requirements after cooking food is being able to keep the internal, holding temperatures at 135°F or higher, so make sure to check often. Cold foods such as **dairy products should be kept at 41°F or below.** Most of us love leftovers; a way to ensure it doesn't get you sick is to refrigerate it within two hours of preparation. When foods are ready to be reheated, temperatures should reach **165°F for at least 15 seconds.** Ensure that *all leftover foods are used or discarded within 7 days.*

In essence, food safety is about proper planning and preparation. Hand washing, food handling, and proper holding temperatures are just a few simple ways to decrease the number of illnesses. There are many ways FBIs can be spread, so be sure to take extra precaution this holiday season. If you happen to be the observer or helper this year, feel free to remind the cook of proper food handling and appropriate food temperatures. Have a safe and wonderful holiday season!

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